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The Effect of School Counselors' Domain Specialization on
Seniors' Milestone Completion and College Access Planning

By

Nancy J. Bond

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College of the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Major: Educational Administration

Under the Supervision of Dr. Peter J. Smith

Omaha, Nebraska

May, 2013

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ABSTRACT

The Effect of School Counselors' Domain Specialization on Seniors' Milestone Completion and College Access Planning

Nancy J. Bond, M.S.E., Ed.D.

University of Nebraska, 2013

Advisor: Dr. Peter J. Smith

The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of senior high school counselors' domain specializations--academic, advanced education, career, and personal/social--from two urban high schools, on alphabetically assigned graduating seniors' with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages documented college and career readiness milestone completion rates.

The review of literature revealed that a number of factors are impacting the successful outcomes of our students. The study of hope theory, with its focus on goal setting, developing aspirations and increasing hope as a means to drive motivation is critical. Additionally, the literature review highlights the importance of the development of a relationship between student and counselor and the impact this relationship has on achievement indicators. The importance of a plan and a planning system to maintain documentation of progress (the completion of identified milestones) is also found repeatedly in the literature to be critical. The literature also clearly delineates the positive impact school counseling programs have on the students they are designed to serve.

The maximum accrual for this study is ($N=360$) and includes four groups of students from the 2012 graduating class who were assigned to counselors whose domain specializations include: academic, advanced education, career, and personal/social. All

students participated in school counseling activities related to the completion of milestones and college access planning.

The research questions utilized a chi-square test of significance to compare observed verses expected congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (a) completed college or military applications; (b) completed ACT or COMPASS college entrance/placement exams; and (c) requested final transcript to be sent to post-secondary institutions.

Analysis of the data demonstrates no significance of domain specialization on the completion of college readiness milestones and college access planning. Additionally, grade point averages do not impact the college access planning of graduating seniors. This finding is likely attributable to self-reported post-secondary plans as well as the attributes of school counselors. All students are encouraged to complete milestones in preparation for college and career readiness. Implications for policy, practice, and further research are also provided.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The journey has been exciting, but to have arrived at this place in the journey is exhilarating! So many individuals deserve such immense thanks for their invaluable assistance and support along the way.

First and foremost, I must acknowledge my incredibly supportive husband and friend, Tim, for always seeing and supporting my need to “do”. You’ve made life at home so easy by “job sharing” with me. Thank you. To our exceptional children, Lucas and Olivia, whose texts, sticky notes, and words of encouragement have meant the world to me. I know you are thrilled that I will now have more time for us to adventure together! I hope you have become firm believers that anything is possible at any age, but at the same time, don’t shy away from a challenge while you’re young waiting for “the right time”. I love you all more.

To my Mom, Bonnie Bednar, I say thank you for your unending support and for instilling in me this wonderful streak of independence and strength. To my Dad, Joe Bednar, it is so wonderful to see you burst with pride. The pride you both communicate has served to motivate and bring me great joy during this endeavor. To my brothers and sisters...Diane Tegtmeier, Clark Bednar, Mike Bednar, Judy Hagemeyer and Scott Bednar, thanks for always cheering me on in each of your own ways. You are not only my siblings, but my dearest of friends, and now that this journey is over, I look forward to spending more time together with each of you and your families again.

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endeavor. Many, many sincere thanks. To the school counselors with whom I am so proud to share our common mission of supporting students as they strive for success, thank you for always putting the needs of students first.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
LIST OF TABLES	ix
CHAPTER ONE	1
Introduction.....	1
Purpose of the Study/Problem Statement.....	1
Effectively Meeting Students’ Needs – A Precursor to Motivation.....	3
Fueling Motivation: An Introduction to Hope Theory	5
Strategies for Increasing Hope	7
Research Questions	10
Definition of Terms.....	15
Assumptions	18
Limitations	19
Delimitations	19
Significance of the Study	19
CHAPTER TWO	20
Review of Literature	20
Hope Theory: Goals, Agency, Pathways	21
Importance of goal setting.....	23
Aspirations.....	24
Increasing hope.....	25

Relationship development	26
Impact on achievement indicators	27
Importance of a Plan: Communication, Clarity, Completion.....	27
Use of an Electronic Student Planning System	31
Impact of School Counseling on Student Outcomes	32
CHAPTER THREE	40
Methodology	40
Purpose of the Study	40
Participants	40
Description of Procedures	41
Research Questions, Sub-Questions, and Data Analysis	43
CHAPTER 4	50
Results.....	50
Purpose of the Study	50
CHAPTER 5	75
Conclusions and Discussion	75
Summary	75
Research Question #1 Conclusion.....	76
Research Question #2 Conclusion.....	76
Research Question #3 Conclusion.....	77
Research Question #4 Conclusion.....	77
Research Question #5 Conclusion.....	78
Research Question #6 Conclusion.....	78

Research Question #7 Conclusion.....	78
Implications for Policy	78
Implications for Practice	79
Implications for Future Research	80
References	82

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	69
<i>College or Military Application Milestone Completion Rates for Students with Low, Mid-Range and High GPA Levels Being Served by Counselors with Academic Domain Specialization</i>	
Table 2	70
<i>ACT/COMPASS College Entrance/Placement Exam Milestone Completion Rates for Students with Low, Mid-Range and High GPA Levels Being Served by Counselors with Academic Domain Specialization</i>	
Table 3	71
<i>Request for Final Transcript to be Sent to Post-Secondary Institution Milestone Completion Rates for Students with Low, Mid-Range and High GPA Levels Being Served by Counselors with Academic Domain Specialization</i>	
Table 4	72
<i>College or Military Application Milestone Completion Rates for Students with Low, Mid-Range and High GPA Levels Being Served by Counselors with Advanced Education Domain Specialization</i>	
Table 5	73
<i>ACT/COMPASS College Entrance/Placement Exam Milestone Completion Rates for Students with Low, Mid-Range and High GPA Levels Being Served by Counselors with Advanced Education Domain Specialization</i>	
Table 6	74

<i>Request for Final Transcript to be Sent to Post-Secondary Institution Milestone Completion Rates for Students with Low, Mid-Range and High GPA Levels Being Served by Counselors with Advanced Education Domain Specialization</i>	
Table 7	75
<i>College or Military Application Milestone Completion Rates for Students with Low, Mid-Range and High GPA Levels Being Served by Counselors with Career Domain Specialization</i>	
Table 8	76
<i>ACT/COMPASS College Entrance/Placement Exam Milestone Completion Rates for Students with Low, Mid-Range and High GPA Levels Being Served by Counselors with Career Domain Specialization</i>	
Table 9	77
<i>Request for Final Transcript to be Sent to Post-Secondary Institution Milestone Completion Rates for Students with Low, Mid-Range and High GPA Levels Being Served by Counselors with Career Domain Specialization</i>	
Table 10	78
<i>College or Military Application Completion Rates for Students with Low, Mid-Range and High GPA Levels Being Served by Counselors with Personal/Social Domain Specialization</i>	
Table 11	79
<i>ACT/COMPASS College Entrance/Placement Exam Completion Rates for Students with Low, Mid-Range and High GPA Levels Being Served by Counselors with Personal/Social Domain Specialization</i>	

Table 12	80
<i>Request for Final Transcript to be Sent to Post-Secondary Institution Milestone</i>	
<i>Completion Rates for Students with Low, Mid-Range and High GPA Levels Being</i>	
<i>Served by Counselors with Personal/Social Domain Specialization</i>	
Table 13	81
<i>Milestone Completion Rates for Graduating Seniors with Low Grade Point Averages</i>	
<i>Choosing a) Two Year College, b) Four Year College or University, c) Employment,</i>	
<i>d) Military Service or e) Other</i>	
Table 14	82
<i>Milestone Completion Rates for Graduating Seniors with Mid-Range Grade Point</i>	
<i>Averages Choosing a) Two Year College, b) Four Year College or University, c)</i>	
<i>Employment, d) Military Service or e) Other</i>	
Table 15	83
<i>Milestone Completion Rates for Graduating Seniors with High Grade Point Averages</i>	
<i>Choosing a) Two Year College, b) Four Year College or University, c) Employment,</i>	
<i>d) Military Service or e) Other</i>	

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Our country is abuzz with concerns about the state of education. Graduation and post-secondary going rates are not as high as they should be. Ideas for effective reform strategies abound. Lists of improvement strategies...the 10 essential elements of an effective high school, or the 10 key practices or the 10 ways your school can improve attendance are all focused on what educators can do to improve their practices. Perhaps less prevalent are lists of ideas/frameworks designed to enhance students' motivation and student success. The school counseling profession is clearly aligning with the teaching profession in sharing the accountability for student success. Their expertise has begun to look at other factors that may not as typically be considered. To what extent is motivation a contributor to the concerns we face in education today? The positive psychology movement has created a plethora of strengths-based strategies that may prove effective in increasing student achievement. One of the products of the positive psychology movement, hope theory, offers insight and strategy for addressing what may be at the core of school improvement and at the core of instilling in many students the belief that they can achieve their dreams. Does increasing the level of hope experienced by students hold promise for increasing their level of academic achievement? Will students and counselors who understand hope theory and the planning for the future that it requires see evidence of success in the form of increased efforts around college access planning? Do the skills sets of counselors impact this potential?

Purpose of the Study/Problem Statement

The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of senior high school counselors' domain specializations--academic, advanced education, career, and

personal/social--from two urban schools on alphabetically assigned graduating seniors' documented college and career readiness milestone completion rates and college access planning. The evolution of school counseling continues with many large school counseling programs utilizing a system of specialization (particularly in the areas of college and career) to attempt to improve the knowledge and skill sets within a given counseling team. Such specialization generally emanates from the school counseling domains of academic, career, and personal/social espoused by the American School Counselor Association. Often, the academic domain is somewhat further refined in practice as it relates to specialization, as some "academic counselors" on a counseling team might more directly support academically struggling students and others might be considered "college counselors". College counselors would still be working within the academic domain, but with students who need specific support in accessing post-secondary information and completing activities related to the college planning process. Scant literature exists that explores the relationships of such specializations on the effect of student outcomes. Some alarming statistics (Simmons, 2011) do shed some light on the problem: K-12 national average school counselor to student ratio is 460:1 (although the number can rise to 700 or more). Only 21% of public high schools have a dedicated college-counseling position (compared to 77% of private schools). The quality of college counseling is particularly critical for students who are the first in their family to attend college. Compared to their often more affluent peers, first generation students rely heavily on their school counselor for the information they need to navigate the college planning process. Simmons goes on to express the belief that higher education access involves two separate but connected areas: expanding the numbers of students attending,

but also, examining the type of higher education setting those students are accessing (i.e. community college as opposed to a more selective four-year college). Improvements in the school counseling specialization of advanced education (or college counseling) would impact both areas. Simmons continues to report that the number of counselor education programs in the country (466) does not reflect the number of programs that include a course on the college-selection process (fewer than 45). He cites the School Counseling Fellows program at the John Hopkins University School of Education as an innovative example of such a program. Simmons highlights a critical need for longitudinal data systems that link student data from the K-12 setting to that of the higher education setting and beyond to truly measure the effectiveness of our college and career readiness preparation measures.

With a strong theoretical foundation to provide an understanding of what contributes to the motivation and academic success of students, this study will explore the specific impact of a counselor's particular area of specialization on milestone completion rates specifically and college access planning in general.

Effectively Meeting Students' Needs – A Precursor to Motivation

A positive framework that has existed for many years cannot be ignored as we contemplate how we can more effectively motivate students to complete the milestones necessary to attain the goal of completing high school and going on to access some form of post-secondary education.

In 1943, Abraham Maslow provided us with a clear hierarchy of the needs that he believed fuel motivation. While educators have long studied the theory, the application of Maslow's Needs Hierarchy might be better utilized to improve the outcomes and the hope of improved outcomes for today's students.

How can we most effectively provide the level of support individual students' need—when they need it? All too often in education, our support structures do not identify students early enough, do not/cannot respond quickly enough and interventions are not effective enough to achieve the desired result. As schools work to increase the variety of supports that are provided to students, it may be beneficial to review these supports as they correlate to Maslow's Hierarchy. For example, to meet the basic physiological needs of students, schools often provide free breakfast in addition to their lunch program.

Moving up the pyramid to meet the safety and security needs, schools recognize their obligation to provide a safe and secure learning environment. This need for protection extends to physical and emotional safety. Many programmatic efforts are made to enhance school climate to better meet this need. On a very simplistic level, we know that for many students, the activities associated with attending school are stressful. Are the daily interactions between staff and students positively contributing to students' feelings of being safe and secure?

Social needs are the needs for friendship, belonging and acceptance that all students must have met before they can truly self-actualize. One of the most obvious and direct places for schools today to begin to meet this need on a systemic level is to incorporate an advisement program so that all students have a means of belonging to a smaller, tight knit "family" within their school. It is in the effort to meet the social needs of students where districts need to assume an "all hands on deck" mentality to deploy as many staff as possible to the direct support of students in order to assist them in their attempts to connect positively with others and truly engage with their learning

community. This positive connection with a caring adult will assist them in experiencing hope – generating an excitement within them about their future.

Esteem needs are those needs that are met as individuals experience some measure of school success, recognition, self-confidence, and ultimately, the basic human functioning need for competence. Recognizing the talents of individual students, particularly in those areas that have historically not been recognized, could benefit far larger numbers of students than is currently the case.

Maslow's self-actualization needs are reflected in many mission statements across the country. Ultimately, we want for all students to reach their highest potential. Not that all students would achieve this within the course of their secondary school years. We would hope that all students leave us secure in the knowledge that they are prepared to ultimately achieve their highest potential – and will likely go far toward reaching that potential during a post-secondary educational experience.

Fueling Motivation: An Introduction to Hope Theory

Snyder and colleagues (Snyder et al., 1991) have introduced a relatively new cognitive, motivational model called hope theory. Hope theory is a strengths-based construct that is part of the relatively recently emerging positive psychology field. (Snyder et al, 2003). According to Valle and Suldo, (2004), Snyder's multidimensional hope theory incorporates three components: goals, pathways, and agency. Goals are essential to hope theory, being described as the cornerstone of hope theory.

“Hope, according to Snyder, Feldman, Shorey, and Rand, (2002, p. 298.), is that which enables people to set valued goals, to see the means to achieve those goals and to find the drive to make those goals happen.” They go on to point out that school

counselors are well positioned to prepare students to make adaptive choices by instilling in them what we call hope. Instilling hope is to impart it gradually, drop by drop, interaction by interaction. Snyder, Harris et al. (1991) indicate that hopeful thinking includes three components: goals, pathways thinking, and agency thinking. They further describe goals as hoped-for ends, while pathways thoughts reflect a person's belief in their ability to produce cognitive routes to desired goals and agency cognitions are the thoughts that people have regarding their ability to begin and continue movement on their chosen pathways toward those goals.

According to the Gallup Organization, hope is defined as the ideas and energy we have for the future. It drives effort, academic achievement, and credits earned. The Gallup Student Poll, 2009, is a measure of students' hope, engagement, and well-being. Researchers associated with the Poll indicate that hope predicts GPA and retention in college and that hope scores are more robust predictors of college success than high school GPA, or SAT or ACT scores. Research has further shown that hope, engagement and well-being are actionable targets and indicators of success, with links to grades, achievement scores, retention, and employment (Lopez, 2009).

Lopez et al. (2004) claim that regardless the system of psychotherapy that might be utilized with individuals; beneficial change may be attributable, in part, to hope. As educators contemplating the importance of improving the outcomes our students are experiencing, would instilling hope or the use of hope theory with our students on a systems level, be an effective approach? It would seem worthy of exploration by our teacher education and counselor education programs across country. To be a nation of hopeful individuals seems like a truly American concept.

Strategies for Increasing Hope

What can be done with intention to make students hopeful and for what purpose? Halpin (2001) clearly sees the implication for education when he references Warnock (1986, p. 408) "...education is particularly fitted to encourage hope...To feel competent, able to act, able to change or control things, or even to create them, these are all aspects of feeling hope...To find that today you can begin to do something you could not do yesterday is to begin to hope." Halpin, (2001, p. 408) goes on to say "there is a sense in which the identification of any educational aim implies an element of ultimate hopefulness..." Educators have traditionally been taught to use a deficit-remediation model. Strengths-based approaches/strategies are much healthier for all involved.

Student intervention/support might include providing the Strengths Finders assessment to students. We all evolve in a very gradual, almost unnoticeable manner. Seldom do individuals engage in a sustained effort to fully know one-self. Students would benefit from learning how Strengths Finders information could best be applied to promote their academic, career, and personal/social development. How would Strengths Finders promote a strengths-based personal learning planning process (goal setting) that could result in the completion of the necessary milestones to ensure career readiness and post-secondary matriculation? How would students respond to a positive "label" rather than to the multiple negative labels that education has frequently applied to students for so many years?

Snyder and colleagues at the University of Kansas in Lawrence (2003) advise that the basis for imparting hope rests on helping students to set goals. They also cite additional research that indicates students also benefit as they think about and assist

others with their goal setting. They may be doing so based on their natural human altruistic needs, but experience the pleasure that comes from feeling good about one self after having helped someone else. This would also support the findings of the Search Institute that speak to the power of service to others. The late Peter Scales and Nancy Leffert of the Search Institute cite numerous studies in their 2004 book entitled *Developmental Assets: A Synthesis of the Scientific Research on Adolescent Development* that community service/service-learning have been associated with decreased school failure, suspension, dropout; increased reading grades, increased school attendance; increased commitment to class work; reduced teenage pregnancy, and the list goes on.

To be more intentional about the areas in which students might set relevant goals, the Clifton Strengths Finders serves an integral purpose. It is an online assessment in which one learns 34 different themes and their own top five strengths or talents. Communication, Activator, and Achiever would be examples. This tool is widely utilized and speaks to the curiosity and desire to know more about oneself as a way of leading more effective and meaningful lives. It might be helpful to understand one's signature themes (according to the Gallup Organization's Clifton Strengths Finder assessment) as we explore avenues for instilling hope in others. There will be wide variation in hope building activities which will be greatly impacted by the individuality and strengths that both the adults and students bring to the situation.

Measuring hope-giving strategies would ultimately be accomplished by measuring the critical indicators of success that are used to measure achievement (attendance rates, various measures of academic achievement, citizenship (based on

reduced behavioral indices of suspensions/expulsions), graduation rate, college going rates, etc.) as well as future/repeated measurements using the Gallup Student Poll.

Numerous sources, as cited above, would indicate that hope appears to a construct that deserves more attention for the power it has to promote positive behaviors. Indeed, hope has been identified as a predictor of positive affect and the best predictor of grades, (Snyder, et al., 2003).

Hope had a more reliable effect on total school grades as well as individual subjects than positive attributes and self-esteem. Snyder et al (1997) would further indicate that hope is significantly related to standardized school achievement tests and that it explains unique additional variance relative to other predictors such as self-esteem (as cited in Ciarrochi, Heaven, and Davies, 2007). At the same time, Ciarrochi and colleagues indicate the following: that low hope is responsible for decreasing a student's possibilities for academic success: i.e. making the cut off for a gifted class, graduating with a high GPA or making it into a chosen university course of study. Hope is important for goal-directed behavior such as school grades and is also a significant predictor of specific behaviors, such as inattention, aggressiveness, and hyperactivity (as observed by teachers). Over time, the effects of hope may be cumulative. Hope has important implications for school achievement in that low hope students perform worse than expected based on verbal and numerical ability scores.

With that in mind, it seems unethical that educators not recognize the importance of and act on the intentional strategies that can enhance hope in our students. Helping students reach their full potential must be more than a mission statement. Schools must shoulder some of the responsibility for engaging in the goal setting process that allows

students to take personalized, actionable steps to plan for their future. Many states have mandated this Personalized Learning Plan process. Steps have been taken to create mechanisms to support the tracking of the milestones needing to be completed in the goal setting process. Does the domain specialization of a particular counselor impact the outcome of this goal setting process as it relates to milestone completion and college access planning?

Research Questions

Overarching posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #1. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors from two urban high schools whose domain specialization was academic support have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (a) completed college or military applications; (b) completed ACT or COMPASS college entrance/placement exams; and (c) requested final transcript to be sent to post-secondary institutions?

Posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #1a. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors whose domain specialization was academic support have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (a) completed college or military applications?

Posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #1b. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors whose domain specialization was academic support have congruent or

different milestone completion frequencies for: (b) completed ACT or COMPASS college entrance/placement exams?

Posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #1c. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors whose domain specialization was academic support have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (c) requested final transcript to be sent to post-secondary institutions?

Overarching posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #2. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors from two urban high schools whose domain specialization was advanced education have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (a) completed college or military applications; (b) completed ACT or COMPASS college entrance/placement exams; and (c) requested final transcript to be sent to post-secondary institutions?

Posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #2a. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors whose domain specialization was advanced education have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (a) completed college or military applications?

Posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #2b. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors whose domain specialization was advanced education have congruent or

different milestone completion frequencies for: (b) completed ACT or COMPASS college entrance/placement exams?

Posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #2c. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors whose domain specialization was advanced education have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (c) requested final transcript to be sent to post-secondary institutions?

Overarching posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #3. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors from two urban high schools whose domain specialization was career education have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (a) completed college or military applications; (b) completed ACT or COMPASS college entrance/placement exams; and (c) requested final transcript to be sent to post-secondary institutions?

Posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #3a. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors whose domain specialization was career education have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (a) completed college or military applications?

Posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #3b. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors whose domain specialization was career education have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (b) completed ACT or COMPASS college entrance/placement exams?

Posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #3c. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors whose domain specialization was career education have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (c) requested final transcript to be sent to post-secondary institutions?

Overarching posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #4. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors from two urban high schools whose domain specialization was personal/social support have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (a) completed college or military applications; (b) completed ACT or COMPASS college entrance/placement exams; and (c) requested final transcript to be sent to post-secondary institutions?

Posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #4a. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors whose domain specialization was personal/social support have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (a) completed college or military applications?

Posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #4b. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors whose domain specialization was personal/social support have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (b) completed ACT or COMPASS college entrance/placement exams?

Posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #4c. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors whose domain specialization was personal/social support have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (c) requested final transcript to be sent to post-secondary institutions?

Overarching posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #5. Do graduating seniors with low Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors from two urban high schools whose domain specialization was academic support, advanced education, career education, and personal/social support have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for documented college milestone completion results for students' choosing (a) two-year college, (b) four-year college or university, (c) employment, (d) military service, or (e) other?

Overarching posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #6. Do graduating seniors with mid-range Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors from two urban high schools whose domain specialization was academic support, advanced education, career education, and personal/social support have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for documented college milestone completion results for students' choosing (a) two-year college, (b) four-year college or university, (c) employment, (d) military service, or (e) other?

Overarching posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #7. Do graduating seniors with high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors from two urban high schools whose domain specialization was academic support, advanced education, career education, and personal/social support have congruent or different

milestone completion frequencies for documented college milestone completion results for students' choosing (a) two-year college, (b) four-year college or university, (c) employment, (d) military service, or (e) other?

Definition of Terms

Academic support. Academic support describes the responsibility of school counselors to support the academic program of students.

ACT. Originally standing for “American College Testing,” in 1996 the official name of the organization was changed to better reflect the broad array of programs and services offered beyond college entrance testing. The ACT is also the predominant college entrance exam utilized in the midwest (ACT, 2012).

Advanced education. A school counseling area (within the academic counseling domain specialization) characterized by additional professional development leading to increased knowledge of and involvement with the college planning process (often referred to as college counseling).

Career counseling. Counseling that focuses on career choices, especially the relationships between the needs of clients and their vocational development over the life span.

Chi Square test. A nonparametric statistical test used to determine whether two variables are statistically independent, that is, whether a set of observed frequencies differ significantly from a set of hypothesized expected frequencies by chance alone.

College entrance exam. Any standardized test which is needed in order for one to be considered eligible for admission to a post-secondary institution.

College placement exam. An exam utilized to determine if a student is at college level in reading, writing, English, or math.

College representatives. Staff from college admissions offices that visit high schools to present informational programs to prospective students, parents and counselors are referred to as college representatives or college reps.

College selection process. The process of matching a student's academic strengths, social and life experiences with their goals and aspirations and choosing a college based on that process.

Compass. The ACT Compass is a computer-adaptive college placement test that allows educators to evaluate incoming students' skill levels in Reading, Writing Skills, Writing Essay, Math, and English as a Second Language, place students in appropriate courses and connect students to the resources they need to achieve academic success (ACT, 2012).

Domain. A scope or sphere of influence or knowledge which in counseling consists of the American School Counselor Association recognized domains of academic, career and personal/social.

Final transcript. A transcript required by most post-secondary institutions representing a student's entire high school academic career.

Financial aid presentation. An opportunity to assist high school students and their parents understand the various types of financial aid that exist to support advanced education (grants, loans, scholarships, and work study).

Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). An application that collects financial and other information used to calculate the Expected Family Contribution

(EFC), which postsecondary schools use to determine the student's eligibility for aid (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

Graduation status. Graduation status represents a determination of the progress that each student has made toward graduation.

High GPA. Grade point averages, also known as GPA scores, are numbers showing the grades earned by students in many types of academic programs. High GPA for purposes of this study will be defined as: 3.00 and above.

Hope. The sum of perceived capabilities to produce routes (pathways) to desired goals, along with the perceived motivation to use those routes and can be further broken down into three components: 1) the establishment of goals, 2) effective pathways for reaching the goals (including overcoming obstacles along pathways or creating alternative pathways when necessary, and 3) the perceived motivation via agency thinking to use the pathways that will bring us to our goals.

Hope theory. Hope theory constitutes the theoretical framework that places thinking, rather than emotions, at the core of hope.

Low GPA. Grade point averages, also known as GPA scores, are numbers showing the grades earned by students in many types of academic programs. Low GPA for purposes of this study will be defined as: 0-1.99.

Mid-range GPA. Grade point averages, also known as GPA scores, are numbers showing the grades earned by students in many types of academic programs. Mid-range GPA for purposes of this study will be defined as: 2.00-2.99.

Milestones completion. Milestones completion refers to the completion of critical tasks that are monitored and completed throughout a student's high school career.

Personal learning plan. A student's personal learning plan represents a structured and supported process undertaken by an individual to reflect upon their own learning, performance and/or achievement and to plan for their personal, educational and career development.

Personal/social support. The responsibility to provide support to students having any personal or peer related concerns.

Post-secondary institutions. Also referred to as institutions of higher education, includes those institutions that award professional certifications, as well as associate degrees, bachelor degrees, and advanced degrees.

School counselor. A professional counselor who has had specialized training in working with children and adolescents and who is employed in a school setting (Gladding, 2001).

Senior credit check. A school counselor's review of the transcript of a student in the fourth year of high school to ensure that the student has all of the credits completed or in progress in order to meet the necessary requirements for graduation.

Assumptions

School counselors in the state of Nebraska are teachers first (two years of teaching is required for certification) and all have state certification resulting from a Masters degree in School Counseling. They have chosen to engage in this arena of education (sacrificing the pay that their colleagues who have elected to enter the slightly more lucrative arena of school administration are receiving) from a deep commitment to enhance the lives of the students with whom they work. Advocating and assisting students with their day to day success as well as working alongside students to assist

them in planning for their futures, is inherent in their role and is assumed to be the reason they elected to serve in this capacity. The counselor to student ratio in the state of Nebraska is 1:364.

Limitations

The data being utilized for this study is being accessed through a relatively new electronic student planning system being utilized by counselors within the study. The extent to which the system has been fully implemented and consistently utilized may serve to limit some data elements beneficial for the study.

Delimitations

A delimitation of this study is that the unit of analysis will be confined to two urban high schools serving students with high needs. This study will not account for the effect of domain specializations of counselors serving students in another setting.

Significance of the Study

Given the limited amount of research on the impact of the use of counseling domain specializations, this study will inform administrators/counseling supervisors of best practice related to the management of school counseling programs and counselor responsibilities. With the urgency that exists in the current educational climate, educational leaders must ensure that systemic efforts have been made to ensure all staffing groups are working as effectively as possible. This study will seek to ensure that that is the case for school counselors.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

Hope. Many educators believe that hope holds promise for impacting the achievement of today's students. At the same time, these "soft" psychological constructs are often questioned for the impact they might bring to the "hard" world of data collection and results. Can hope impact graduation rates and college going? Does work to promote hope deserve consideration as a plausible intervention that may hold promise for impacting the students' lives we hold in the balance? Many researchers provide evidence that it does impact performance. For more than 20 years, hope has been studied to determine the value it brings to students (Pedrotti, Edwards & Lopez, 2008). Larsen (Larsen, Edey, & Lemay, 2007) describe a virtual explosion in hope research over the past 20 years as a result of the awareness of the importance of hope in the counseling process. For much longer than that, the field of positive psychology has explored what would happen if we focused less on deficit thinking but focused more attention on the positive attributes or strengths of individuals to bring about greater success and goal attainment.

This review will include the literature around hope theory (and its impact on goal setting), the importance of goal setting, the importance of the personal learning plan and the possible use and benefits of an electronic student planning system to document and monitor the implementation of the milestones that comprise a student's Personal Learning Plan. School counseling outcome research will also be explored to determine what exists in the literature relative to the benefits of school counseling programs for students. The knowledge and skill sets of school counselors (domain specializations) will

also be explored to determine if school counseling and school counseling specializations in particular impact the outcomes for our students.

Hope Theory: Goals, Agency, Pathways

The late C.R. Snyder and colleagues (Snyder, et al., 2002) have been influential in the study of hope and define hope as the ideas and energy we have for the future. Their hope theory is a model of goal-directed thinking and explores the development of goals, agency thinking (goal-directed determination-*will power*) and pathway thinking (planning to meet goals -*way power*) (Snyder, 1994). They and others believe that goal setting is the cornerstone of hope. They see hope as “the perceived capability to derive pathways to desired goals, and motivate oneself via agency thinking to use those pathways” (Snyder, 2002, p. 249). Attachment, that trusting connection with a caregiver, is important in the development of hope. Children who establish these powerful bonds develop the greatest amount of hope (Bowlby, 1980). It would be expected that this connection would exist between child and parent, but it can also exist between child and teacher or counselor.

Once the foundation is set for hopeful thinking, the stage is also set for goal attainment. Goals are hoped-for ends. Teen age students should be given a great deal of latitude in their goal choices, but counselors may find that students’ goals are not ambitious or that they have problems developing a list of potential goals. Most students require assistance with this goal-setting process. Low-hope adolescents may have great difficulty in developing a list of meaningful goals. Students, who have come to believe they have little autonomy in their lives, will often be apathetic and struggle to set goals (Snyder, 2002).

Many educators and Departments of Education across the country also believe that setting goals, or spoken in another way, developing Personal or Individual Learning Plans, will bring about increased student success. This review of literature will also explore the premise behind the decision of 23 states to require some form of a long-term education plan (Colasanti, 2008).

Hope theory as a social science construct became of interest as Dr. Donald Clifton of Nebraska began the study of positive psychology and questioned the impact we would have on individuals if we studied what was right with them rather than simply looking at deficits (Clifton, 2011). Dr. C.R. Snyder at the University of Kansas at Lawrence continued this study and developed the concepts of goals, agency thinking and pathways thinking. Agency thinking is the willpower and motivation to move toward ones goals and pathways thinking is the mental capacity to make it so, to develop the routes toward the goals (Pedrotti, et al., 2008). Galassi and Akos (2007) described this process in another way, the goals that matter to students, the strategies that can be used to pursue these goals, and the motivation that can keep them on track. According to the Gallup Organization, hope is defined as the ideas and energy we have for the future, drives effort, academic achievement, as well as credits earned. The Gallup Student Poll (2009) is a measure of students' hope, engagement, and well-being. Researchers associated with the Poll indicate that hope predicts GPA and retention in college and hope scores are more robust predictors of college success than even high school GPA, or SAT or ACT scores.

Chip and Dan Heath (2010) review similar constructs and refer to these constructs as the elephant and the rider. One could also equate these constructs with the emotional

and the rational. The Heath brothers challenge us to direct the rider, motivate the elephant, and shape the path. They describe the rider as the thinker and planner but caution that he has a tendency to spin his wheels. He spends too much time analyzing and focused on weakness and not enough time focused on strengths. The elephant is the emotional being that can easily be driven and motivated by passion. To illustrate: “perched atop the Elephant, the Rider holds the reins and seems to be the leader. But the rider’s control is precarious because the Rider is so small relative to the Elephant. Anytime the six-ton Elephant and the Rider disagree about which direction to go, the Rider is going to lose. He’s completely overmatched.” (Heath, 2010, p. 7)

Importance of goal setting

Personal experience with goal setting is widespread. Whether it has been the informal, New Year’s resolution variety, or the large organizational strategic planning variety, it is accepted that without a clear statement of where it is that one is going and absent the clear delineation of the steps one would take to arrive there, one is very likely not to reach their destination. Few educators or parents would question the value and importance of setting goals and devising the accompanying strategies necessary to attain them. In fact, it is believed (Sergiovanni, 2004, p. 33), that “the lever that can make difficult situations manageable and challenging goals attainable is *hope*. Placing hope at the core of our school community provides encouragement and promotes clear thinking and informed action, giving us the leverage we need to close the achievement gap and solve other intractable problems”. Many schools have high hope as a school community, but are not succeeding because they have no systematic process for transforming hope

into action. Moving from an ordinary school to a community of hope is a kind of psychological magic both on an individual and school-wide basis.

Aspirations

Goal setting helps us articulate our aspirations. Helping students to aspire to greatness is a primary focus of a positive school culture. We encourage setting goals with clear endpoints so that we enable students to experience success and clearly feel the satisfaction of accomplishing the goal.

We frequently encourage our students and our own children to dream. We refer to dream colleges, we ask them to visualize themselves at their workplace 10 years after graduating from high school to see themselves where they truly want to be and we encourage them to dream BIG, setting their expectations as high as possible so as to truly reach their potential (or as the adage goes, “Shoot for the moon, even if you miss, you’ll still land among the stars”). Successfully encouraging students to aspire to reach their full potential could be positively impacted by work recently done at Stanford University. Dweck, 2007, illuminates the difference in thinking of two different types of mindsets. She describes individuals with a growth mindset and others with a fixed mindset. Students with a growth mindset have the belief that they are able to acquire new skills and expand current skills simply by applying themselves and being open to the new experience. Those individuals holding a fixed mindset hold fast to the notion that their talents have already been dispersed and if one does not currently possess an aptitude or predisposition for the talent in question, it very likely cannot be developed. Persons adhering to this mindset severely limit their ability to develop greater potential because of the limitations imposed by the fixed mindset.

Research has shown significant correlations between race and educational aspirations (Akos, Lambie, Milson,, & Gilbert, 2007). White students are much more likely to be enrolled in a college preparatory program than their African American peers. Other research has also found that the significance of socioeconomic status in the decision to pursue college is stronger than both race and gender. Individuals with lower socio economic status typically have lower aspirations toward college (Akos, Lambie, Milsom, & Gilbert, 2007). Recent occupational projections demonstrate continued growth in occupations for which some postsecondary education is required. School counselors must provide academic and career counseling that is of the quality that demonstrates advocacy for all students. School counselors must ensure that methods by which students and their parents are provided information on future choices do not unnecessarily limit their future educational and occupational aspirations.

Increasing hope

Once the mindset of an individual is determined, it is necessary to begin the work of intentionally increasing their level of hope. As hope is defined as the ideas and energy we have for the future, it is important to explore the means for increasing the level of those ideas and energies. It can become a very intentional focus with a measurable outcome in terms of the levels of hope, engagement and well-being that students self report. Hope building strategies can easily be infused into the school environment. One such strategy would be the utilization of the Clifton Strengths Finder or Strengths Explorer (Lopez, 2005) so that students can begin to possess the language to identify and describe their strengths. Recognizing and learning the language to describe the innate talents they possess can be a powerful force in propelling them toward having great

positive energy for the future. Creating excitement about their future (Lopez, 2010) can motivate and generate even more energy.

Outlined in an article published in the *Journal of Advanced Academics*, (Kaylor, 2007) was the description of a program entitled Possible Selves, in which the six components of the program to increase goal orientation and motivation were listed: discovering, thinking, sketching, reflecting, planning, and working. The first component of the program, discovering, refers to discovering one's strengths and interests. Participants were then asked to think about their hopes and expectations, and subsequently asked to sketch a representation of their expectations, hopes, and fears. They then planned actions by setting goals and developing action plans and finally, worked toward their goals. Perhaps the greatest benefit of this program was that it was conducive to fostering the caring adult-student relationship that research has shown increases academic achievement.

Relationship development

As students take many cues about their talents from the feedback they receive from the adults around them, it is critical that adults in the school setting (and in general proximity to youth) invest time in the development of relationships with youth. It has been said that all youth need to have someone who loves them unconditionally (Scales & Leffert, 2004). Imagine the power and potential success of the educational system if this were true for all students. All students should expect that as a result of their educational experiences, they have additional caring adults in their lives. These adults should all be future oriented, in that all being taught is future oriented: preparing all students to be

college and career ready with the interpersonal and social skills necessary to be productive members of society.

Impact on achievement indicators

In order to maximize the potential impact on achievement, the relationships developed need to have a focus on goal setting, including the short term goals associated with achieving academic success on a day to day, course by course, year by year basis. The short term goals set must have an immediate impact on the students' achievement indicators to continue to feed/motivate the elephant. The use of solution-focused thinking/counseling techniques can be very effective in promoting a strengths-based environment in which students can truly thrive (DeShazer, 2007). Additionally, the utilization of the Developmental Assets framework can also promote the positive behaviors that will increase the potential for positive academic outcomes. At the same time, increasing numbers of assets will protect students from the risk behaviors that can so effectively sidetrack or derail academic success (Scales & Leffert, 2004).

Importance of a Plan: Communication, Clarity, Completion

It's been said that, unless hope is aroused and alive, there can be no planning. Why is a plan so important? Specifically, a plan serves three purposes: it communicates the desires of the planner, it provides the clarity of action that is needed to ensure success, and it is the measurable component that is essential to achieve goal completion. For all students, but especially for students who are: first generation, living in poverty, students of color, undocumented, pregnant and/or parenting, and students with disabilities, a plan is essential.

The use of Personalized Learning Plans may build on the well-established Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for students with learning disabilities (Center, 2010).

IEP's came into existence in 1975 with the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (D'Orio, 2009). PLP's, which don't enjoy such a lengthy history, are tools often employed as part of a comprehensive counseling program. One key goal is to foster student engagement and subsequently improve academic outcomes. There is no specific answer for what PLP's should include, but they must identify goals and point to the future. Current research does not yet link the use of PLP's to student outcomes, such as academic achievement, graduation, or dropout rates.

The National High School Center (2010) has provided descriptions of PLP's from five states selected to represent a range of practices. Outcome data is limited, so the practices described do not necessarily represent best practices. Florida's and Washington's learning plans seem to be the most similar to an IEP. In Washington, the goal of the SLP (Student Learning Plan) is to ensure that students are on track for graduation and provide regular communication to parents about students' academic progress. A number of different plans are available. All students may have a High School and Beyond Plan whereas another plan may be for students who were: not successful in a content area on the state assessment, at risk of not meeting academic targets, or showed signs that they may not be on track to graduate. SLP's are maintained until students meet the Washington Assessment of Student Learning standards. Key elements include:

- input from students, teachers, and parents
- strategies to improve knowledge and skills
- strategies to assist parents in working with students to improve skills
- ongoing contact with parents

Providing clarity by stating the goal(s) clearly and providing clear cut details for how to get there will assist in translating aspirations into actions. Ambiguity is exhausting. What often appears to be resistance is often a lack of clarity (Heath, 2010).

In Florida, the goal of the SLP is to assist low-performing students attain proficiency in reading/language arts and math. Instruction is tailored to the individual student. The target population having SLP's are those students not meeting state and district proficiency levels in reading/language arts and math. Key elements of the plans include:

- plan based on student academic performance and assessment data
- specific, measureable goals
- state-approved providers of supplemental educational services
- individualized instructional program/strategies tailored to student needs
- schedule for frequent monitoring

Kentucky, Vermont, and Delaware and a number of local efforts were also reviewed by the National High School Center to provide resources in the area of personalized learning planning.

Positive results for the use of individual learning plans are noted in Howard County, Maryland. About 25% of the district's students were struggling academically until plans were required (Colgan, 2002). Now many of those students are reading and doing math at grade level. They credit that success with the district's adoption of individual learning plans for those students who had fallen behind.

The Education Commission of the States conducted research in 2008 to identify state wide initiatives that require students to create long-term plans. The subsequent

database that has been created has identified twenty-three states and the District of Columbia that require students to create some form of a long-term plan. Fifteen states and the District of Columbia require students to develop an individual learning plan, often by the 9th grade. Four states require students to complete a set of courses from a career pathway or major.

Bloom and Kissane (2011) conducted a similar survey detailing the policies states were enforcing that required individual learning plans for all students. Policy makers had recognized the importance of capturing and monitoring course-taking, assessment results, postsecondary plans, career aspirations, and extracurricular activities so that schools could more effectively engage students and have an improved means of monitoring and improving student performance.

A personalized learning plan is distinctive because it places a student's personal aspiration at the center of their quest. (The power of goal setting with students is helping them see goals as dreams with deadlines.) It is not simply a turbo advising program, nor a single event, but rather, the beginning of a four-year conversation between a student, their parents, counselor, and teachers about that student's hopes and dreams for the future (Gibson & Clarke, 2000). Gibson continues by sharing his belief that the movement towards personal learning plans appears to have been built and sustained by three simple but powerful principles:

- asking individuals what they're good at (identifying strengths), what interests them, and what they want to do with their lives
- responding with creative openness to all possibilities and developing plans that allow individuals to pursue their dreams

- sharing resources that can help individuals achieve their goals

Use of an Electronic Student Planning System

Communicating the elements of the plan will increase the likelihood that the plan will be followed. This communication can also increase the level of support to the student. A team of individuals encouraging a student will be much more successful in positioning a student for success than one working in isolation.

Effectively and meaningfully assisting our students in planning for their futures is a complex process. In today's climate, knowing that all students must graduate from high school being college and career ready, we must be focused on the planning required for each.

In the previous research conducted by the National High School Center, both Washington and Kentucky utilized electronic ILP tools designed to facilitate the process of creating and monitoring learning plans for students. While there are many ways to personalize a student's learning plan, there are four major areas that require planning to be successful: college, career, course, and success planning.

College planning is an enormously difficult process for many students (and their parents). Building a college-going culture in our schools requires educators to begin increasing awareness of college going at an early age. As students move through high school, their planning needs become much more specific in order to accomplish the many steps required of the college access process.

Many students might have the mistaken notion that career planning is non-essential until after they begin attending college. Students must be educated about the importance of selecting a college based on their career selection. Not all colleges provide

all programs, so knowing the field of study in which a student holds interest is essential to making the correct college selection.

Selecting courses based on a student's chosen career field or cluster (even though that is often a fluid/changing selection) is known to increase the relevancy of that coursework. Providing students with a program of study that will expose them to the coursework that best prepares them for their career choice provides many additional opportunities for students to increase their knowledge of a particular area and improve their ability to make informed career choices, as well as increase the relevance they ascribe to their coursework.

Finally, some students need additional success planning to set goals to overcome barriers to their success. This can be related to various achievement indicators that are not progressing as positively as needed (attendance, behavior, credit accrual, etc.)

An electronic planning system that facilitates college, career, course, and success planning is an optimal practice for the communication, clarity and completion of the plan. An interactive system that encourages access and interaction on the part of counselors, students, parents, teachers, etc. is an ideal means of communicating between the various stakeholders in the student's success. There are a variety of barriers to higher education for our students. It will take the communication of the village, led by a skilled and caring counselor, to ensure each student's success.

Impact of School Counseling on Student Outcomes

Rigorous research indicating that a profession has value and worth is often needed before the public develops trust and a profession establishes credibility. Research evidence of this nature in the school counseling profession is difficult to obtain for

several reasons. Outcomes in school counseling are more difficult to define and measure than often is the case in other professions. Additionally, few large-scale, rigorous studies have been conducted to explore the benefits of school counseling. Those that have been conducted have found school counseling to be beneficial to students (Carey & Harrington, 2010).

The Public Agenda released a report in March 2010, funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation that documents widespread dissatisfaction with the availability, quality and comprehensiveness of school counseling services specifically related to college access and placement. While the report documents concerns, it does not examine the origins and provides little guidance in what efforts might be undertaken to improve counseling services. (Carey, 2010)

Carey and Harrington of the University of Massachusetts' Center for School Outcome Research and Evaluation conducted a study in 2010 of the effectiveness of school counseling programs in five states: Connecticut, Missouri, Nebraska, Rhode Island, and Utah. The results from these studies provide compelling evidence relative to the features and practices that lead to more effective counseling programs and more favorable student outcomes. Nebraska and Utah's studies provide clear and consistent evidence of four important sets of results:

- 1) School counseling in high schools contributes to important educational student outcomes. School counseling adds value to the education of students and enhances their engagement and their performance.
- 2) Student-to-counselor ratios in high schools matter. More favorable ratios were associated with improved attendance rates.

- 3) How the school counseling program is organized matters. More strongly organized programs are better able to produce positive outcomes. Delivery systems practices were found to be more important than management practices. (Assigning domain specializations would be considered a management practice rather than a delivery system function.)
- 4) What counselors choose to do matters. Interventions focused on career development seem to be particularly important to positive academic outcomes.

Carey and Harrington indicate their hope that these studies will pave the way for a comprehensive national study of school counseling effectiveness. Meanwhile, they do conclude that improving educational outcomes would be enhanced by hiring enough counselors to satisfy the needs of students and parents, supporting counselors in developing comprehensive counseling programs that serve all students and focusing on implementing more effective counseling interventions.

In an article summarizing school counseling outcome literature, Whiston and Quinby (2009) found that students who participated in school counseling interventions tended to score on various outcome measures about one third of a standard deviation higher than students who did not receive the interventions. This aligns with the research conducted in Nebraska by Carey and Harrington. The article further explores the four components of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model: guidance curriculum, individual student planning, responsive services and system support. As they discuss the component of guidance curriculum, their writing highlights a promising program called Student Success Skills that is one of few guidance curriculum programs that have been systematically evaluated. Whiston and Quinby go on to report

that with a few exceptions, counselors are using curricular materials that have not been well researched. This is cause for concern, as it is extremely difficult to know what intervention was used with students and then more difficult to know what may have been effective.

The ASCA component of individual student planning involves school counselors facilitating ongoing systemic activities designed to assist students in setting individualized goals and plans for their future. Individual career counseling was found to be the most effective treatment modality as compared to classroom instruction or groups. Counselor-free interventions (like computerized career guidance systems) were significantly less effective. Counselor involvement is essential in setting goals and facilitating career planning.

After reviewing the responsive services component of the ASCA model, Whiston and Quinby (2009) report that individual counseling does not need to be lengthy to be effective. Brief counseling is effective with secondary students.

Lapan, Gysbers, and Sun, (1997) compared schools with fully implemented ASCA model programs with those schools who used a less programmatic approach. Students from the schools with more fully implemented programs were more likely to report a) they earned high grades; b) their education had prepared them for their future; c) they had more college and career information available to them; and d) they rated their high schools more favorably.

In a later study, Lapan, Gysbers, and Petroski (2001) found that middle school students attending middle schools with more fully implemented programs reported

feeling safer, having better relationships with teachers and staff, thinking their education was more relevant to their future, and earning higher grades.

Whiston and Quinby (2009) found that guidance activities are more effective at the middle school and high school levels than at elementary. As it relates to methods of delivering guidance curriculum, small group activities are more effective than curriculum activities that involve a whole classroom. These findings have great significance for the delivery of the most effective school counseling programs and the impact school counseling programs can have on the milestone completion rates and college access planning of our students. Whiston also indicates school counseling interventions appear to be effective in decreasing discipline problems and increasing students' problem-solving skills. This assistance in problem solving is critical and can be described in terms of developing agency and pathway thinking if one is operating within the language of hope theory. It is also important to again note the scarcity of studies that specifically study the impact of individual student planning as this is the component in which secondary school counselors spend a great deal of their time.

A study conducted in 2009 by Militello, Carey, Dimmit, Lee, and Schweid examined the distinguishing characteristics of the work of high school counselors addressing the achievement gap in college placement. Their efforts to explore the relationship between the work of school counselors in promoting college transitions for low-income students have been helpful to review. Based on their results, the following ten themes emerged that reflected distinguishing characteristics:

1. School counselors show effective program management practices.

2. School counselors maintain external partnerships that add resources and social capital.
3. School counselors are leaders in the school.
4. School counselors show effective college-focused interventions with low-income students.
5. School counselors help establish an achievement-oriented school climate.
6. School counselors implement effective parent academic and financial outreach programs.
7. School counselors think systematically and use multi-level interventions.
8. School counselors use school data effectively.
9. School counselors facilitate the development and implementation of inclusive school policies.
10. School counselors routinize mundane aspects of the job or offload nonessential activities to free up time for innovative practice.

Research such as this can serve to further energize effective and meaningful school counseling practice.

While limited research exists on the practice of utilizing school counseling specializations, one study (thought by the author to be the first of its kind), was undertaken in 1965 to determine the nature of and need for this apparently new trend. Crary (1966) defined a specialized counselor as a certified counselor who devoted at least half of his professional time performing the activities related to a certain area of guidance (what now would be considered a domain). One hundred eighteen specialized counselors in Ohio participated in this study. Most had only been specialized for four years or less.

The areas identified for specific specialization were college and educational. Crary indicates his inability to identify other research in this area. Some forty-seven years later, many of the same questions are being asked with surprisingly little additional research having been conducted on this method of organizing school counseling programs and staff.

One particular study of significance to the research currently being undertaken was conducted by Barnes in 2000. In that study, the effects of counselor specialists as opposed to counselor generalists on career maturity of high school students was explored. Given that this research is focused on similar domain specialization but the impact on milestone completion and college access, it is interesting to note that Barnes' study found that students working with a counseling generalist reported significantly more individual career related sessions with their counselor than those students working with a career counseling specialist. The results of this current study will most assuredly be compared with Barnes' results to more accurately gauge the effectiveness of the counselor generalist or domain specialist model of management.

Even more recently, a college counselor in the Baltimore (Maryland) County Public School system asserts that the time for school counseling specialization has come. Ensor (2005) writes of his concern that counseling generalists suffer from enormous caseloads, excessive demands on time, the performance of non-counseling tasks, and a lack of training and knowledge that may assist students and families. He believes that the college admissions process has become so complex that public schools need to identify specific counselors to specialize in college counseling. He identifies what he believes to be a trend in the hiring of college counselors in public secondary schools and believes it

is in the best interest of our students to be able to access a school counselor who has extensive training, knowledge, and experience in all aspects of the intricacies of the college planning process.

So while we know that school counselors and more broadly, comprehensive school counseling programs, impact students positively, this study is designed to further contribute to the body of research available with specific insight into the impact counselor domain specializations may have on milestone completion and college access planning.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of senior high school counselors' domain specializations--academic, advanced education, career, and personal/social--from two urban high schools, on alphabetically assigned graduating seniors' with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages documented college and career readiness milestone completion rates.

Participants

Number of participants. The maximum accrual for this study is ($N=360$) and includes four groups of students from the 2012 graduating class who were assigned to counselors whose domain specializations include: academic, advanced education, career, and personal/social. All students attended one of two urban high schools and participated in school counseling activities related to the completion of milestones and college access planning.

Gender of participants. The gender of the study participants represents the gender make-up of the school they attended.

Age range of participants. Study participants are 2012 high school graduates ranging in age from 17-19 years of age.

Racial and ethnic origin of participants. The racial and ethnic origin of the study participants represents the racial and ethnic origin make-up of the school they attended.

Socio-economic status of participants. The socio-economic status of study participants represents the socio-economic status level of the school they attended.

Inclusion criteria of participants. Study participants include students who are assigned to a counselor alphabetically by last name and whose counselor domain specializations include: academic, advanced education, career, and personal/social.

Method of participant identification. Study participants have been identified as a result of their assignment to a counselor with the domain specialization of: academic, advanced education, career and personal/social.

Description of Procedures

Research design. The posttest only, randomly selected four-group comparative efficacy study design is displayed in the following notation:

Group 1 $X_1 Y_1 O_1$

Group 2 $X_1 Y_2 O_1$

Group 3 $X_1 Y_3 O_1$

Group 4 $X_1 Y_4 O_1$

Group 1 = study participants #1. Was a randomly selected group of graduating seniors ($N = 90$) with control variable low ($n = 30$), mid-range ($n = 30$), and high ($n = 30$) Grade Point Averages.

Group 2 = study participants #2. Was a randomly selected group of graduating seniors ($N = 90$) with control variable low ($n = 30$), mid-range ($n = 30$), and high ($n = 30$) Grade Point Averages.

Group 3 = study participants #3. Was a randomly selected group of graduating seniors ($N = 90$) with control variable low ($n = 30$), mid-range ($n = 30$), and high ($n = 30$) Grade Point Averages.

Group 4 = study participants #4. Was a randomly selected group of graduating seniors ($N = 90$) with control variable low ($n = 30$), mid-range ($n = 30$), and high ($n = 30$) Grade Point Averages.

X_1 = study constant. All students have completed a four-year, traditional, urban high school academic program and have earned required credits sufficient for graduation.

Y_1 = study independent variable counseling condition #1. Graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors from two urban high schools whose domain specialization was academic support.

Y_2 = study independent variable counseling condition #2. Graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors from two urban high schools whose domain specialization was advanced education.

Y_3 = study independent variable counseling condition #3. Graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors from two urban high schools whose domain specialization was career education.

Y_4 = study independent variable counseling condition #4. Graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors from two urban high schools whose domain specialization was personal/social support.

O_1 = study posttest dependent measures. (a) Completed college or military applications; (b) completed ACT or COMPASS college entrance/placement exams; and (c) requested final transcript to be sent to post-secondary institutions.

Research Questions, Sub-Questions, and Data Analysis

The following research questions were used to analyze counseling equity for graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors from two urban high schools with differing domain specializations.

Overarching posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #1. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors from two urban high schools whose domain specialization was academic support have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (a) completed college or military applications; (b) completed ACT or COMPASS college entrance/placement exams; and (c) requested final transcript to be sent to post-secondary institutions.

Posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #1a. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors whose domain specialization was academic support have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (a) completed college or military applications?

Posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #1b. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors whose domain specialization was academic support have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (b) completed ACT or COMPASS college entrance/placement exams?

Posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #1c. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school

counselors whose domain specialization was academic support have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (c) requested final transcript to be sent to post-secondary institutions?

Analysis. Research Question #1 utilized a chi-square test of significance to compare observed verses expected congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (a) completed college or military applications; (b) completed ACT or COMPASS college entrance/placement exams; and (c) requested final transcript to be sent to post-secondary institutions.

An alpha level of .05 was utilized to test the null hypothesis for these frequencies. Frequencies and percentages are displayed in tables.

Overarching posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #2. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors from two urban high schools whose domain specialization was advanced education have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (a) completed college or military applications; (b) completed ACT or COMPASS college entrance/placement exams; and (c) requested final transcript to be sent to post-secondary institutions?

Posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #2a. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors whose domain specialization was advanced education have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (a) completed college or military applications?

Posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #2b. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors whose domain specialization was advanced education have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (b) completed ACT or COMPASS college entrance/placement exams?

Posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #2c. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors whose domain specialization was advanced education have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (c) requested final transcript to be sent to post-secondary institutions?

Analysis. Research Question #2 utilized a chi-square test of significance to compare observed verses expected congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (a) completed college or military applications; (b) completed ACT or COMPASS college entrance/placement exams; and (c) requested final transcript to be sent to post-secondary institutions.

An alpha level of .05 was utilized to test the null hypothesis for these frequencies. Frequencies and percentages are displayed in tables.

Overarching posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #3. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors from two urban high schools whose domain specialization was career education have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (a) completed college or military applications; (b) completed ACT or COMPASS college

entrance/placement exams; and (c) requested final transcript to be sent to post-secondary institutions?

Posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #3a. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors whose domain specialization was career education have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (a) completed college or military applications?

Posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #3b. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors whose domain specialization was career education have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (b) completed ACT or COMPASS college entrance/placement exams?

Posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #3c. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors whose domain specialization was career education have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (c) requested final transcript to be sent to post-secondary institutions?

Analysis. Research Question #3 utilized a chi-square test of significance to compare observed verses expected congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (a) completed college or military applications; (b) completed ACT or COMPASS college entrance/placement exams; and (c) requested final transcript to be sent to post-secondary institutions.

An alpha level of .05 was utilized to test the null hypothesis for these frequencies. Frequencies and percentages are displayed in tables.

Overarching posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #4. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors from two urban high schools whose domain specialization was personal/social support have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (a) completed college or military applications; (b) completed ACT or COMPASS college entrance/placement exams; and (c) requested final transcript to be sent to post-secondary institutions?

Posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #4a. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors whose domain specialization was personal/social support have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (a) completed college or military applications?

Posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #4b. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors whose domain specialization was personal/social support have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (b) completed ACT or COMPASS college entrance/placement exams?

Posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #4c. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors whose domain specialization was personal/social support have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (c) requested final transcript to be sent to post-secondary institutions?

Analysis. Research Question #4 utilized a chi-square test of significance to compare observed versus expected congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (a) completed college or military applications; (b) completed ACT or COMPASS college entrance/placement exams; and (c) requested final transcript to be sent to post-secondary institutions.

An alpha level of .05 was utilized to test the null hypothesis for these frequencies. Frequencies and percentages are displayed in tables.

Overarching posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #5. Do graduating seniors with low Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors from two urban high schools whose domain specialization was academic support, advanced education, career education, and personal/social support have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for documented college milestone completion results for students' choosing (a) two-year college, (b) four-year college or university, (c) employment, (d) military service, or (e) other?

Analysis. Research Question #5 utilized a chi-square test of significance to compare observed versus expected congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for graduating seniors with low Grade Point Averages choosing: (a) a two-year college, (b) four-year college or university, (c) employment, (d) military service, or (e) other. An alpha level of .05 was utilized to test the null hypothesis for these frequencies. Frequencies and percentages are displayed in tables.

Overarching posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #6. Do graduating seniors with mid-range Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors from two urban high schools whose domain specialization was academic support,

advanced education, career education, and personal/social support have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for documented college milestone completion results for students' choosing (a) two-year college, (b) four-year college or university, (c) employment, (d) military service, or (e) other?

Analysis. Research Question #6 utilized a chi-square test of significance to compare observed verses expected congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for graduating seniors with mid-range Grade Point Averages choosing: (a) two-year college, (b) four-year college or university, (c) employment, (d) military service, or (e) other. An alpha level of .05 was utilized to test the null hypothesis for these frequencies. Frequencies and percentages are displayed in tables.

Overarching posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #7. Do graduating seniors with high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors from two urban high schools whose domain specialization was academic support, advanced education, career education, and personal/social support have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for documented college milestone completion results for students' choosing (a) two-year college, (b) four-year college or university, (c) employment, (d) military service, or (e) other?

Analysis. Research Question #7 utilized a chi-square test of significance to compare observed verses expected congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for graduating seniors with high Grade Point Averages choosing: (a) two-year college, (b) four-year college or university, (c) employment, (d) military service, or (e) other. An alpha level of .05 was utilized to test the null hypothesis for these frequencies. Frequencies and percentages are displayed in tables.

CHAPTER 4

Results

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of senior high school counselors' domain specializations--academic, advanced education, career, and personal/social--from two urban high schools, on alphabetically assigned graduating seniors' with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages documented college and career readiness milestone completion rates.

Overarching posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #1. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors from two urban high schools whose domain specialization was academic support have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (a) completed college or military applications; (b) completed ACT or COMPASS college entrance/placement exams; and (c) requested final transcript to be sent to post-secondary institutions?

Posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #1a. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors whose domain specialization was academic support have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (a) completed college or military applications?

The results of the chi-square (χ^2) test for independence comparing observed verses expected congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for completed college or military applications are contained in Table 1. The result of the χ^2 test was

significant ($\chi^2(2, N = 90) = 7.89, p = .02$). The null hypothesis of no difference in completion frequencies for college or military applications among low GPA, medium GPA, and high GPA students was rejected.

Posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #1b. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors whose domain specialization was academic support have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (b) completed ACT or COMPASS college entrance/placement exams?

The results of the chi-square (χ^2) test for independence comparing observed verses expected congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for completed college or military applications are contained in Table 2. The result of the χ^2 test was significant ($\chi^2(2, N = 90) = 19.69, p < .01$). The null hypothesis of no difference in completion frequencies for college or military applications among low GPA, medium GPA, and high GPA students was rejected.

Posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #1c. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors whose domain specialization was academic support have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (c) requested final transcript to be sent to post-secondary institutions?

The results of the chi-square (χ^2) test for independence comparing observed verses expected congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for completed college or military applications are contained in Table 3. The result of the χ^2 test was not significant ($\chi^2(2, N = 90) = 1.31, p = .52$). The null hypothesis of no difference in

completion frequencies for college or military applications among low GPA, medium GPA, and high GPA students was not rejected.

Overarching posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #2. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors from two urban high schools whose domain specialization was advanced education have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (a) completed college or military applications; (b) completed ACT or COMPASS college entrance/placement exams; and (c) requested final transcript to be sent to post-secondary institutions?

Posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #2a. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors whose domain specialization was advanced education have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (a) completed college or military applications?

The results of the chi-square (χ^2) test for independence comparing observed verses expected congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for completed college or military applications are contained in Table 4. The result of the χ^2 test was significant ($\chi^2 (2, N = 90) = 7.00, p = .03$). The null hypothesis of no difference in completion frequencies for college or military applications among low GPA, medium GPA, and high GPA students was rejected.

Posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #2b. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors whose domain specialization was advanced education have congruent or

different milestone completion frequencies for: (b) completed ACT or COMPASS college entrance/placement exams?

The results of the chi-square (χ^2) test for independence comparing observed verses expected congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for completed college or military applications are contained in Table 5. The result of the χ^2 test was significant ($\chi^2 (2, N = 90) = 24.91, p < .01$). The null hypothesis of no difference in completion frequencies for college or military applications among low GPA, medium GPA, and high GPA students was rejected.

Posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #2c. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors whose domain specialization was advanced education have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (c) requested final transcript to be sent to post-secondary institutions?

The results of the chi-square (χ^2) test for independence comparing observed verses expected congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for completed college or military applications are contained in Table 6. The result of the χ^2 test was not significant ($\chi^2 (2, N = 90) = 2.70, p = .26$). The null hypothesis of no difference in completion frequencies for college or military applications among low GPA, medium GPA, and high GPA students was not rejected.

Overarching posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #3. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors from two urban high schools whose domain specialization was career education have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (a)

completed college or military applications; (b) completed ACT or COMPASS college entrance/placement exams; and (c) requested final transcript to be sent to post-secondary institutions?

Posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #3a. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors whose domain specialization was career education have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (a) completed college or military applications?

The results of the chi-square (χ^2) test for independence comparing observed verses expected congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for completed college or military applications are contained in Table 7. The result of the χ^2 test was not significant ($\chi^2 (2, N = 90) = 5.34, p = .07$). The null hypothesis of no difference in completion frequencies for college or military applications among low GPA, medium GPA, and high GPA students was not rejected.

Posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #3b. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors whose domain specialization was career education have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (b) completed ACT or COMPASS college entrance/placement exams?

The results of the chi-square (χ^2) test for independence comparing observed verses expected congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for completed college or military applications are contained in Table 8. The result of the χ^2 test was significant ($\chi^2 (2, N = 90) = 22.13, p < .01$). The null hypothesis of no difference in

completion frequencies for college or military applications among low GPA, medium GPA, and high GPA students was rejected.

Posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #3c. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors whose domain specialization was career education have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (c) requested final transcript to be sent to post-secondary institutions?

The results of the chi-square (χ^2) test for independence comparing observed verses expected congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for completed college or military applications are contained in Table 9. The result of the χ^2 test was not significant ($\chi^2 (2, N = 90) = 3.12, p = .21$). The null hypothesis of no difference in completion frequencies for college or military applications among low GPA, medium GPA, and high GPA students was not rejected.

Overarching posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #4. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors from two urban high schools whose domain specialization was personal/social support have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (a) completed college or military applications; (b) completed ACT or COMPASS college entrance/placement exams; and (c) requested final transcript to be sent to post-secondary institutions?

Posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #4a. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors whose domain specialization was personal/social support have congruent or

different milestone completion frequencies for: (a) completed college or military applications?

The results of the chi-square (χ^2) test for independence comparing observed verses expected congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for completed college or military applications are contained in Table 10. The result of the χ^2 test was not significant ($\chi^2 (2, N = 90) = 4.02, p = .13$). The null hypothesis of no difference in completion frequencies for college or military applications among low GPA, medium GPA, and high GPA students was not rejected.

Posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #4b. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors whose domain specialization was personal/social support have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for: (b) completed ACT or COMPASS college entrance/placement exams?

The results of the chi-square (χ^2) test for independence comparing observed verses expected congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for completed college or military applications are contained in Table 11. The result of the χ^2 test was significant ($\chi^2 (2, N = 90) = 16.70, p < .01$). The null hypothesis of no difference in completion frequencies for college or military applications among low GPA, medium GPA, and high GPA students was rejected.

Posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #4c. Do graduating seniors with low, mid-range, and high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors whose domain specialization was personal/social support have congruent or

different milestone completion frequencies for: (c) requested final transcript to be sent to post-secondary institutions?

The results of the chi-square (χ^2) test for independence comparing observed verses expected congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for completed college or military applications are contained in Table 12. The result of the χ^2 test was significant ($\chi^2 (2, N = 90) = 9.79, p = .01$). The null hypothesis of no difference in completion frequencies for college or military applications among low GPA, medium GPA, and high GPA students was rejected.

Overarching posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #5. Do graduating seniors with low Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors from two urban high schools whose domain specialization was academic support, advanced education, career education, and personal/social support have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for documented college milestone completion results for students' choosing (a) two-year college, (b) four-year college or university, (c) employment, (d) military service, or (e) other?

The results of the chi-square (χ^2) test for independence comparing observed verses expected congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for students' choosing (a) two-year college, (b) four-year college or university, (c) employment, (d) military service, or (e) other are contained in Table 13. The result of the χ^2 test was not significant ($\chi^2 (2, N = 60) = 19.76, p = .07$). The null hypothesis of no difference in completion frequencies for choosing (a) two-year college, (b) four-year college or university, (c) employment, (d) military service, or (e) other among low GPA students was not rejected.

Overarching posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #6. Do graduating seniors with mid-range Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors from two urban high schools whose domain specialization was academic support, advanced education, career education, and personal/social support have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for documented college milestone completion results for students' choosing (a) two-year college, (b) four-year college or university, (c) employment, (d) military service, or (e) other?

The results of the chi-square (χ^2) test for independence comparing observed verses expected congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for students' choosing (a) two-year college, (b) four-year college or university, (c) employment, (d) military service, or (e) other are contained in Table 14. The result of the χ^2 test was not significant ($\chi^2 (2, N = 150) = 18.43, p = .10$). The null hypothesis of no difference in completion frequencies for choosing (a) two-year college, (b) four-year college or university, (c) employment, (d) military service, or (e) other among mid-range GPA students was not rejected.

Overarching posttest-posttest counseling condition research question #7. Do graduating seniors with high Grade Point Averages assigned to school counselors from two urban high schools whose domain specialization was academic support, advanced education, career education, and personal/social support have congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for documented college milestone completion results for students' choosing (a) two-year college, (b) four-year college or university, (c) employment, (d) military service, or (e) other?

The results of the chi-square (χ^2) test for independence comparing observed versus expected congruent or different milestone completion frequencies for students' choosing (a) two-year college, (b) four-year college or university, (c) employment, (d) military service, or (e) other are contained in Table 15. The result of the χ^2 test was not significant ($\chi^2 (2, N = 150) = 13.48, p = .14$). The null hypothesis of no difference in completion frequencies for choosing a (a) two-year college, (b) four-year college or university, (c) employment, (d) military service, or (e) other among high GPA students was not rejected.

Table 1

College or Military Application Milestone Completion Rates for Students with Low, Mid-Range and High GPA Levels Being Served by Counselors with Academic Domain Specialization

	Completed	Not Completed	
GPA Level	<i>N</i> (%)	<i>N</i> (%)	χ^2
Low	10 (14%)	7 (44%)	
Mid-range	26 (35%)	4 (25%)	
High	38 (51%)	5 (31%)	
Total	74 (100%)	16 (100%)	7.89

χ^2 significant for observed versus expected cell frequencies with $df = 2$ and tabled value = 5.99 for alpha level of .05.

Table 2

ACT/COMPASS College Entrance/Placement Exam Milestone Completion Rates for Students with Low, Mid-Range and High GPA Levels Being Served by Counselors with Academic Domain Specialization

	Completed	Not Completed	
GPA Level	<i>N</i> (%)	<i>N</i> (%)	χ^2
Low	6 (9%)	11(48%)	
Mid-range	22 (32%)	8 (35%)	
High	39 (58%)	4 (17%)	
Total	67 (100%)	23 (100%)	19.69

χ^2 significant for observed versus expected cell frequencies with $df = 2$ and tabled value = 5.99 for alpha level of .05

Table 3

Request for Final Transcript to be Sent to Post-Secondary Institution Milestone Completion Rates for Students with Low, Mid-Range and High GPA Levels Being Served by Counselors with Academic Domain Specialization

	Completed	Not Completed	
GPA Level	<i>N</i> (%)	<i>N</i> (%)	χ^2
Low	13 (18%)	4 (24%)	
Mid-range	23 (32%)	7 (41%)	
High	37 (51%)	6 (35%)	
Total	73 (100%)	17 (100%)	1.31

χ^2 not significant for observed versus expected cell frequencies with $df = 2$ and tabled value = 5.99 for alpha level of .05

Table 4

College or Military Application Milestone Completion Rates for Students with Low, Mid-Range and High GPA Levels Being Served by Counselors with Advanced Education Domain Specialization

	Completed	Not Completed	
GPA Level	<i>N</i> (%)	<i>N</i> (%)	χ^2
Low	9 (11%)	3 (33%)	
Mid-range	28 (35%)	5 (56%)	
High	44 (54%)	1 (11%)	
Total	81 (100%)	9 (100%)	7.00

χ^2 significant for observed versus expected cell frequencies with $df = 2$ and tabled value = 5.99 for alpha level of .05

Table 5

ACT/COMPASS College Entrance/Placement Exam Milestone Completion Rates for Students with Low, Mid-Range and High GPA Levels Being Served by Counselors with Advanced Education Domain Specialization

	Completed	Not Completed	
GPA Level	<i>N</i> (%)	<i>N</i> (%)	χ^2
Low	3 (5%)	9 (39%)	
Mid-range	22 (33%)	11 (48%)	
High	42 (63%)	3 (13%)	
Total	67 (100%)	23 (100%)	24.91

χ^2 significant for observed versus expected cell frequencies with $df = 2$ and tabled value = 5.99 for alpha level of .05

Table 6

Request for Final Transcript to be Sent to Post-Secondary Institution Milestone Completion Rates for Students with Low, Mid-Range and High GPA Levels Being Served by Counselors with Advanced Education Domain Specialization

	Completed	Not Completed	
GPA Level	<i>N</i> (%)	<i>N</i> (%)	χ^2
Low	11 (13%)	1 (13%)	
Mid-range	28 (34%)	5 (63%)	
High	43 (52%)	2 (25%)	
Total	82 (100%)	8 (100%)	2.70

χ^2 not significant for observed versus expected cell frequencies with $df = 2$ and tabled value = 5.99 for alpha level of .05

Table 7

College or Military Application Milestone Completion Rates for Students with Low, Mid-Range and High GPA Levels Being Served by Counselors with Career Domain Specialization

	Completed	Not Completed	
GPA Level	<i>N</i> (%)	<i>N</i> (%)	χ^2
Low	15 (18%)	3 (60%)	
Mid-range	42 (49%)	1 (20%)	
High	28 (33%)	1 (20%)	
Total	85 (100%)	5 (100%)	5.34

χ^2 not significant for observed versus expected cell frequencies with $df = 2$ and tabled value = 5.99 for alpha level of .05

Table 8

ACT/COMPASS College Entrance/Placement Exam Milestone Completion Rates for Students with Low, Mid-Range and High GPA Levels Being Served by Counselors with Career Domain Specialization

	Completed	Not Completed	
GPA Level	<i>N</i> (%)	<i>N</i> (%)	χ^2
Low	6 (9%)	12 (48%)	
Mid-range	31 (48%)	12 (48%)	
High	28 (43%)	1 (4%)	
Total	65 (100%)	25 (100%)	22.13

χ^2 significant for observed versus expected cell frequencies with $df = 2$ and tabled value = 5.99 for alpha level of .05

Table 9

Request for Final Transcript to be Sent to Post-Secondary Institution Milestone Completion Rates for Students with Low, Mid-Range and High GPA Levels Being Served by Counselors with Career Domain Specialization

	Completed	Not Completed	
GPA Level	<i>N</i> (%)	<i>N</i> (%)	χ^2
Low	16 (19%)	2 (33%)	
Mid-range	39 (46%)	4 (67%)	
High	29 (35%)	0 (0%)	
Total	84 (100%)	6 (100%)	3.12

χ^2 not significant for observed versus expected cell frequencies with $df = 2$ and tabled value = 5.99 for alpha level of .05

Table 10

College or Military Application Completion Rates for Students with Low, Mid-Range and High GPA Levels Being Served by Counselors with Personal/Social Domain Specialization

	Completed	Not Completed	
GPA Level	<i>N</i> (%)	<i>N</i> (%)	χ^2
Low	8 (11%)	5 (26%)	
Mid-range	34 (48%)	10 (53%)	
High	29 (41%)	4 (21%)	
Total	71 (100%)	19 (100%)	4.02

χ^2 not significant for observed versus expected cell frequencies with $df = 2$ and tabled value = 5.99 for alpha level of .05

Table 11

ACT/COMPASS College Entrance/Placement Exam Completion Rates for Students with Low, Mid-Range and High GPA Levels Being Served by Counselors with Personal/Social Domain Specialization

	Completed	Not Completed	
GPA Level	<i>N</i> (%)	<i>N</i> (%)	χ^2
Low	3 (5%)	10 (36%)	
Mid-range	31 (50%)	13 (46%)	
High	28 (45%)	5 (18%)	
Total	62 (100%)	28 (100%)	16.70

χ^2 significant for observed versus expected cell frequencies with $df = 2$ and tabled value = 5.99 for alpha level of .05

Table 12

Request for Final Transcript to be Sent to Post-Secondary Institution Milestone Completion Rates for Students with Low, Mid-Range and High GPA Levels Being Served by Counselors with Personal/Social Domain Specialization

	Completed	Not Completed	
GPA Level	<i>N</i> (%)	<i>N</i> (%)	χ^2
Low	7 (9%)	6 (40%)	
Mid-range	38 (51%)	6 (40%)	
High	30 (40%)	3 (20%)	
Total	75 (100%)	15 (100%)	9.79

χ^2 significant for observed versus expected cell frequencies with $df = 2$ and tabled value = 5.99 for alpha level of .05

Table 13

Milestone Completion Rates for Graduating Seniors with Low Grade Point Averages Choosing a) Two Year College, b) Four Year College or University, c) Employment, d) Military Service or e) Other

Counseling Domain	Selection Results					χ^2
	2-yr College	4-yr College	Employed	Military	Other	
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	
Academic Support	8 (23%)	5 (50%)	1 (33%)	0 (0%)	3 (33%)	
Advanced Education	8 (23%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (100%)	1 (11%)	
Career Education	13 (37%)	2 (20%)	1 (33%)	0 (0%)	2 (22%)	
Personal/Social Support	6 (17%)	3 (30%)	1 (33%)	0 (0%)	3 (33%)	
Total	35 (100%)	10 (100%)	3 (100%)	3 (100%)	9 (100%)	19.76

χ^2 not significant for observed versus expected cell frequencies with $df = 12$ and tabled value = 21.03 for alpha level of .05

Table 14

Milestone Completion Rates for Graduating Seniors with Mid-Range Grade Point Averages

Choosing a) Two Year College, b) Four Year College or University, c) Employment, d) Military Service or e) Other

Counseling Domain	Selection Results					χ^2
	2-yr College	4-yr College	Employed	Military	Other	
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	
Academic Support	18 (28%)	7 (11%)	1 (33%)	0 (0%)	4 (33%)	
Advanced Education	15 (23%)	13 (20%)	1 (33%)	1 (17%)	3 (25%)	
Career Education	18 (28%)	23 (36%)	1 (33%)	1 (17%)	0 (0%)	
Personal/Social Support	14 (22%)	21 (33%)	0 (0%)	4 (67%)	5 (42%)	
Total	65 (100%)	64 (100%)	3 (100%)	6 (100%)	12 (100%)	18.43

χ^2 not significant for observed versus expected cell frequencies with $df = 12$ and tabled value = 21.03 for alpha level of .05

Table 15

Milestone Completion Rates for Graduating Seniors with High Grade Point Averages Choosing
a) Two Year College, b) Four Year College or University, c) Employment, d) Military Service or
e) Other

Counseling Domain	Selection Results				χ^2
	2-yr College N (%)	4-yr College N (%)	Military N (%)	Other N (%)	
Academic Support	4 (18%)	33 (28%)	1 (100%)	5 (63%)	
Advanced Education	10 (46%)	34 (29%)	0 (0%)	1 (13%)	
Career Education	6 (27%)	23 (19%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	
Personal/Social Support	2 (9%)	29 (24%)	0 (0%)	2 (25%)	
Total	22 (100%)	119 (100%)	1 (100%)	8 (100%)	13.48

χ^2 not significant for observed versus expected cell frequencies with $df = 9$ and tabled value = 16.92 for alpha level of .05

CHAPTER 5

Conclusions and Discussion

This final chapter will provide a summary of the study, conclusions based on the research questions from the study, a review of the findings from the analysis of the data utilized in the study, as well as implications for policy, practice, and potential future research.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of senior high school counselors' domain specializations--academic, advanced education, career, and personal/social--from two urban schools on alphabetically assigned graduating seniors' documented college and career readiness milestone completion rates and college access planning.

Analysis of the data generally demonstrates no significance of domain specialization on the completion of college readiness milestones and college access planning. Additionally, grade point averages do not impact the college access planning of graduating seniors. This finding is likely attributable to self-reported post-secondary plans as well as the attributes of school counselors. School counselors in this large urban district contribute to a positive culture that values the diversity and differences of all students. All students are important and all are encouraged and supported to complete necessary milestones in preparation for college and career readiness. Additionally, educators must be responsive to the national call for post-secondary education and training for all citizens, not merely those who are academically gifted. The benefits of post-secondary education to the individual and to society are too great to be ignored.

Research Question #1 Conclusion

Research question 1a: Graduating seniors with low GPAs being served by counselors within the academic domain did not complete college applications at the rate expected compared to students with mid-range and high GPAs.

Research question 1b: Graduating seniors with low GPAs being served by counselors within the academic domain did not complete the ACT/COMPASS entrance/placement exam at the expected rate compared to students with mid-range and high GPAs. Graduating seniors with high GPAs completed the ACT/COMPASS at a rate higher than what would have been expected.

Research question 1c: No significance was found among this group. All students being served by counselors within the academic domain, regardless of GPA level, requested transcripts to be sent to post-secondary institutions at the rate which would have been expected.

Research Question #2 Conclusion

Research question 2a: Graduating seniors with high GPAs being served by counselors within the advanced education domain completed college applications at a rate higher than would have been expected.

Research question 2b: Graduating seniors with high GPAs being served by counselors within the advanced education domain completed the ACT/COMPASS entrance/placement exam at a rate significantly higher than what would have been expected.

Research question 2c: No significance was found among this group. All students being served by counselors within the advanced education domain, regardless of GPA

level, requested transcripts to be sent to post-secondary institutions at the rate which would have been expected.

Research Question #3 Conclusion

Research question 3a: No significance was found among this group. All students being served by counselors within the career domain, regardless of GPA level, completed college and military applications at the rate which would have been expected.

Research question 3b: Graduating seniors with high GPAs being served by counselors within the career domain completed the ACT/COMPASS entrance/placement exam at a rate significantly higher than what would have been expected.

Research question 3c: No significance was found among this group. All students being served by counselors within the career domain, regardless of GPA level, requested transcripts to be sent to post-secondary institutions at the rate which would have been expected.

Research Question #4 Conclusion

Research question 4a: No significance was found among this group. All students being served by counselors within the personal/social domain, regardless of GPA level, completed college and military applications at the rate which would have been expected.

Research question 4b: Graduating seniors with high GPAs being served by counselors within the personal/social domain completed the ACT/COMPASS entrance/placement exam at a rate significantly higher than what would have been expected.

Research question 4c: Graduating seniors with mid-range and high GPAs being served by counselors within the personal/social domain requested transcripts to be sent to post-secondary institutions at a rate higher than what would have been expected.

Research Question #5 Conclusion

No significance was found among this group. All students, regardless of GPA level, completed milestones and college access planning outcomes at the rate which would have been expected.

Research Question #6 Conclusion

No significance was found among this group. All students, regardless of GPA level, completed milestones and college access planning outcomes at the rate which would have been expected.

Research Question #7 Conclusion

No significance was found among this group. All students, regardless of GPA level, completed milestones and college access planning outcomes at the rate which would have been expected. The exception in this group of graduating seniors with high GPAs, students did not select employment as an immediate post-secondary outcome.

Implications for Policy

The significance that exists throughout all domains relative to the impact of GPA on ACT/COMPASS completion might have implications for all of Nebraska's school districts. It may be very beneficial for all schools to consider offering the ACT/COMPASS test to all juniors to increase the rate at which all students (regardless of GPA) complete this milestone. Nebraska's State Board of Education wisely passed a resolution in March of 2011 to evaluate the use of the ACT on a state-wide basis for

eleventh grade students as a means to increase college going rates and improve career readiness. While they should be encouraged to broaden this pilot to include the COMPASS, the effort to encourage all students to complete this milestone in preparation for college and career should be acknowledged, supported and expanded for the benefit of Nebraska's citizenry. We must be responsive to the national call for post-secondary education and training for all citizens, not merely those who are academically gifted. All citizens have areas of strength in which they can and must contribute economically to society. The benefits to society economically, socially, and in the area of health and wellness cannot be ignored.

Implications for Practice

This study validates the findings of Barnes (2000) in which he found that students working with a counseling generalist reported significantly more individual career related sessions with their counselor than those students working with a career counseling specialist. Given that the results of this study do not indicate any significant findings dependent on the domain specialization of the assigned counselor; one can surmise that the effectiveness of the counselor generalist is based upon the relationship of the assigned counselor (generalist) has with their students. The specific knowledge held by the assigned counselor resulting from the additional professional development based on their domain specialization does not appear to impact the milestone completion rates of students. This would serve to also validate much current literature that stresses the importance of positive relationships with students. It is in the power of the relationships that staff develops with their students that we see the impact of our efforts.

Fundamental to each and every counseling position should be the expectation that knowing and advocating for all students must be the primary objective of the counselor. It is through the potential anonymity of school settings that students are unintentionally “given the option” of not being successful. Through knowing and advocating for students, counselors are uniquely positioned to instill hope, set individualized, meaningful goals and positively impact the motivation that students require to achieve successful academic outcomes.

Implications for Future Research

It should be noted that data collected for this study was data accessed through Naviance Succeed, a student planning system being utilized by the counselors within this large urban district for a relatively short period of time. With time and resulting increased use, the data would likely be more robust. Additionally, student outcome data used for this study was self-reported data that students projected at the time of their graduation. Further study might include use of the National Student Clearinghouse data for enrollment verification to determine that students’ projected outcomes were actually achieved in the fall following their graduation.

Given that this research did not find significance for the domain specialization of counselors to impact the milestone completion rates and resulting post-secondary outcomes for students, an additional area of study might focus on the ratio of counselor to students. As we want to maximize the effectiveness of counselors in achieving the desired outcomes for our students, exploring the ideal ratio that would significantly impact the success of students would be worthy of further study. Very few counselors across the country work in settings at the American School Counselor Association

(ASCA) recommended ratio of 1:250 students, but of those who do, does it impact outcomes? At what ratio would outcomes become even more significant? The answers to these questions and others would be especially useful to determine the level at which counselors should be funded to best support our students. College and career readiness and the specific milestones needing to be completed to ensure that readiness would very likely be impacted with lower ratios. Additionally, the time spent working individually with students would significantly increase with smaller caseloads. The goal setting and instilling of hope so vital to the motivation that drives students to achieve would be greatly enhanced with lower ratios.

As educators across the country are searching for the methods and means to positively impact achievement, the staff positioned to hear the “voice” of students should be doing so in a manageable ratio that is structured to bring about success. To assign students to counselors at ratios of 1:300 or above, does little to impact the day to day success of students, it frequently reduces the counselors role to that of course scheduler and crisis responder. To proactively plan, set goals, adjust the plan as needed with frequent, regular monitoring occurring, requires that counselors are working with numbers of students that are realistic given a forty hour work week.

No other area within America’s high schools has the tremendous impact on society that the college and career readiness of our students has. Efforts toward improving the accountability and effectiveness of all staffing groups supporting this college and career readiness must continue. Sending a prepared body of students on to successfully achieve their optimal post-secondary plans will benefit us all.

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